

**Submission to the Dublin and Cities Electoral  
Area Boundary Committee**

Thursday, 13 March 2008

Dear Secretary,

I wish to make the following observations on the local electoral area boundaries on behalf of the Dublin North East Labour Party and myself.

**The Terms of Reference are Badly Flawed**

The exclusion for consideration of the size of the councils in Dublin City, the three other Dublin counties, the major Irish cities and the counties surrounding Dublin and the other cities is a fatal flaw in this review. In general terms, to give roughly equal democratic mandates to all City and County Councillors and through them to Seanad Eireann, the Councillor numbers in the above area should be at least doubled (and simply trebled in the case of the four Dublin Counties).

An opportunity exists for a fundamental democratic reform of local government and this issue of unequal treatment of the centres of larger populations should be addressed before 2009. Quite simply in the Dublin region, the 20 or so major area committees such as Dublin North Central Ward and the Howth and Malahide Wards in my own constituency should become full local councils with

perhaps 20 to 25 members. Other urban counties should receive the same representation. In tandem, it should be possible to have a high-powered smaller elected East Region Executive headed by the elected Mayor of Greater Dublin.

The Seanad remains a totally undemocratic institution because of the continuing failure to address the nonsense whereby Swords, for example, with nearly 50,000 citizens has only five councillors and Blarney with over 42,000 has only four councillors while rural wards with under 7000 people have five plus county councillors (and similar votes for 43 members of Seanad Eireann). Indeed, there are many rural seven seaters with under 5000 or even 4000 electors. The variance from natural population to councillor ratios in many urban wards is astonishing and outrageous (as for example Lucan, 150%; South East Inner City, 140%; South West Inner City, 149%; North Inner City, 150%; Mulhuddart, 178%; Swords, 143%; Carrigaline, 130%; Tallaght South, 132%).

The same trend is visible in the Dail constituency I represent. The Artane and Donaghmede Wards which I represented on Dublin City Council for 12 years have national variances of plus 86% and 87% respectively. The Howth Ward has a national variance of plus 39% and the Malahide Ward (half of which was moved by the Dail Electoral Commission into Dublin North East) has a variance of plus 55%.

### **The Artane Coolock Ward to Remain as Constituted and At Least a 4-Seater**

While the Artane Ward straddles two Dail constituencies (Dublin North Central and Dublin North East) the general shape of the ward between the old Swords Road/M1 and the Malahide Road and between Beaumont Road and the N32 forms a distinct quarter of Dublin City centred on Northside (now to be a Prime Urban Centre) and Coolock Village. The population of older Artane estates has fallen but North Coolock and the Coolock/Belcamp/Hilton Square area of the North Fringe has a much younger and growing population.

Traditionally this greater Coolock area has been represented in a single ward at Dublin City Council and now has its own local area management at the new Northside Civic Centre in the Coolock Village/Northside/East Santry axis of the ward. The latter area is due to grow exponentially (with over 2,500 housing units in the pipeline at Bunratty Road, New Northside Prime Urban Centre and the old Lawrence lands at the junction of the M1 and Oscar Traynor Road). As a City Cllr. for the ward for eight years I believe it is a homogenous area in local government terms and should continue as a separate ward with at least four seats.

### **The Donaghmede/Raheny Ward to Remain As Constituted and At Least a 5-Seater**

The above ward also has been a culturally and socially homogenous outer City Quarter for the past 40 years. While the southern Raheny areas have suffered some population decline due to the "empty nest" syndrome the older central areas from

Ayrfield through Donaghmede and Kilbarrack have a rejuvenated population with younger families moving in. The northern sector of this ward is undergoing an explosive population growth as a whole new city region of 10,000 plus housing units are being built in Clongriffin, Beaupark, Belmayne and adjoining areas of South Fingal. Already over 1,000 of these homes are occupied with a further 3,000 either built and waiting for sale or close to completion. The result will be an additional four parishes (in current population terms) to be added to the existing six parishes of the Donaghmede/Raheny ward.

As with Artane/Coolock, it is also important that these new areas remain in a single ward so that local representatives on bodies like the North Fringe Forum can contribute to the detailed sustainable planning of the new areas. Donaghmede Shopping Centre, Clare Hall Shopping Centre, Edenmore Shopping Centre, Kilbarrack Shopping Centre, Greendale Shopping Centre, historic Raheny Village and Harmonstown Centre form the core commercial areas of this city ward and the new North Fringe Boulevard will be the centre of the new urban region running across the north of the Donaghmede Ward. Social, health, educational, cultural (including sporting), environmental, traffic and civic aspects of this ward have a common basis and for this reason the ward should retain its current character. In national terms it should have at least nine Councillors but it certainly should not have less than five.

**Howth/Sutton/Baldoyle Ward of Fingal County Council to Remain as Constituted and At Least a 3-Seater**

The Howth Peninsula (with Howth and Sutton parishes) is unique topographically and culturally and for over two decades has been closely linked with Baldoyle and Mid-Sutton parishes. The area east of the Belfast and DART railway line and of Kilbarrack Road also has a homogenous cultural and social character. Similar to the Artane and Donaghmede Wards, massive housing construction is also taking place in the Baldoyle North Fringe and in South Portmarnock. Up to 3,000 housing units are built or being planned at The Coast, the new urban region in Baldoyle contiguous to Balgriffin, Belmayne and Clare Hall/Belcamp in the two adjoining City Wards. The new and growing population of The Coast was not captured by the 2006 Census since few homes were occupied in April 2006 but Sectors 1 and 2 of the new region (of six sectors) are now being steadily populated.

The Howth Peninsula itself is also undergoing a steady densification with over 400 homes and apartments built, approved or being planned in the past two or three years and a large new brownfield site at Techrete in Howth Town will most likely be the location of a large apartment planning application before the 2009 local elections. The Howth Ward was historically a ward of Dublin City Council up to 1987 and was a historic city ward like Pembroke and Rathmines in the south city. Many of my constituents still would prefer the Howth Ward to be a ward of Dublin City Council (which they say cherished the area more than Fingal or Dublin County Council).

In any event, they wish the historic and unique shape of the ward to be maintained even within Fingal County Council. They argue that Howth/Sutton/Baldoyle's unique needs (in terms of drainage, the fishing and tourism business and fragile environment – both the Howth Peninsula and Baldoyle Bay are designated Irish and EU special amenity areas) can be best met as a single ward. My own party has never taken one of the three seats in an election for the Howth Ward so far but I fully accept the views of my constituents. (Baldoyle, for example, is a polder, uniquely in Fingal). So the Howth Ward should remain as it is now constituted and at least a 3-seater.

**Malahide/Portmarnock Ward Should Remain As Presently Constituted and At Least a 4-Seater**

The general remarks made about the Artane, Donaghmede and Howth Wards apply similarly to Portmarnock/Malahide. Major new residential and commercial developments are approved and being planned for south Portmarnock and Balgriffin. Most recently the first 700 of 1,500 homes in the Baldoyle/ South Portmarnock Area Action Plan were approved and south east Portmarnock has seen major residential development in the past five years. The Portmarnock/Malahide Ward had a plus 55% variation so the ward should have at least six Councillors in national population terms. But certainly the representation of the ward should not be less than four.

In many counties, a burgeoning urban area like Malahide would have its own Town Council as well as being a significant County Council Ward. Likewise with Portmarnock, in many other counties

the town might have its own town council as well as having significant county council representation with neighbouring Howth/Sutton/Baldoyle.

Fingal County is among the fastest growing urban regions in Europe and this will have to be represented at local and Dail level in years to come but for Election 2009, the integrity of the Portmarnock/Malahide Ward should be maintained with enhanced representation.

Yours Sincerely,

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Labour T.D. for Dublin North East